

United States District Court
For the Northern District of California

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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

WALKER & ZANGER, INC., No C-04-1946 VRW
Plaintiff, ORDER
v
PARAGON INDUSTRIES, INC.,
Defendant.

Walker & Zanger, Inc filed this action May 18, 2004, against Paragon Industries, Inc, alleging a variety of claims under the Lanham Act, the Copyright Act, state unfair competition law and state false advertising law. Compl (Doc #1).

Defendant moves for summary judgment on plaintiff's claims and moves to strike surveys performed by plaintiff's expert Dr Henry Ostberg. Doc ##82, 87. Plaintiff moves to exclude testimony of defendant's expert Travis Culwell. Doc #107. For reasons discussed below, the court GRANTS IN PART and DENIES IN PART defendant's motion for summary judgment, DENIES defendant's motion to strike and DENIES plaintiff's motion to exclude testimony.

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

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I

2 Plaintiff is a producer of high quality stone and ceramic
3 decorative tiles and tile collections for use in a variety of
4 settings. Doc #111, Ex B at 12:16-25, 13:1-15 (Overend decl).
5 Plaintiff's tiles are nationally marketed in several series, or
6 lines, each of which is devoted to a particular artistic concept,
7 such as a line exemplifying a French provençal theme. Overend
8 decl, Ex G. The tile lines at issue in this case are the Avignon
9 and Newport lines, which were first promoted in approximately
10 August 1999. Overend decl, Ex B.

11 According to plaintiff, the trade dress for the tiles is
12 consistent with the design theme, and, taken as a whole, the design
13 elements of the tiles and their trade dress "create an inherently
14 distinctive and non-functional trade dress which readily identifies
15 [plaintiff's] products as being associated with [plaintiff]." Id.
16 The distinctive features of plaintiff's tiles are said to include
17 classical design, colors and glazes that evoke the look of "Old
18 World handiwork." Id at Ex D; Id at Ex H, at 29:18-25, 47:19-
19 49:25, 55:14-56:2. Other distinguishing characteristics include
20 the depth and dimensions of design relief and the level of
21 intricate detailings. Id at Ex E, no 15; Id at Ex G, at 76:21-
22 77:2, 79:3-80:2. Plaintiff's Avignon line, its best selling tile
23 collection, uses a combination of designs, glazes, textures and
24 colors to create a French provençal theme. Id, Ex G at 18:7-25,
25 19:12-19, 21:2-23:8. The collection is intended to capture a
26 variety of French-inspired designs, specifically invoking the "look
27 and feel" of French architecture and art "over a large span of
28 time. Id, Ex G at 18:7-18.

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 Plaintiff asserts it has put effort and expense into
2 promoting its tiles using the chosen trade dress. Id, Ex E at no
3 16; Ex H at 108:5-18, 108:22-113:13. This includes advertisements
4 in magazines, newspapers and trade publications and appearances at
5 trade shows. Id. From January 2000 to the filing of the
6 complaint, plaintiff invested over \$8 million in this activity. Id
7 at Ex A. Plaintiff applied for copyright registration on several
8 of its designs, and on February 11, 2004, it received copyright
9 registration for its "Avignon Romanesque Molding" and "Avignon
10 Triellage Molding" designs. Id ¶13 & Ex B (copyright
11 registrations).

12 Plaintiff believes that defendant has been producing,
13 promoting and selling tiles with designs and displays that are
14 confusingly similar to plaintiff's. Doc #1 at ¶16. Plaintiff
15 further believes that defendant is in the practice of copying the
16 tile designs of its competitors and offering them as its own,
17 assertedly an unfair method of competition. Id ¶17. In this case,
18 the designs allegedly appropriated by defendant include the "Fleur
19 De Lis Border," "Perle Molding," "Triellage Molding" and
20 "Romanesque Molding" tiles from the Avignon line, and the "Westport
21 Molding" tile from the Newport line. Id ¶18. Plaintiff believes
22 not only that defendant has copied these tiles, but also that
23 defendant has displayed the copies using trade dress similar to
24 that used by plaintiff in promoting its corresponding tiles. Id
25 ¶19.

26 Along with this, plaintiff believes that defendant has
27 made confusing or misleading statements about the relationship
28 between plaintiff's and defendant's tiles. Id ¶20. For example,

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 plaintiff alleges that defendant's representatives have stated that
2 "[defendant's] tiles are the same as [plaintiff's] tiles, but at a
3 much less expensive price." Id. Plaintiff also believes that
4 defendant's representatives have claimed that both plaintiff's and
5 defendant's tiles are made in China, when in fact plaintiff's tiles
6 are not. Id.

7 After the court dismissed plaintiff's defamation claim
8 pursuant to defendant's Rule 12(b)(6) motion, Doc #26, six claims
9 for relief remain. Plaintiff alleges that: (1) defendant has
10 violated section 43(a) of the Lanham Act through unfair competition
11 and false advertising by misappropriating plaintiff's trade dress
12 and making false claims about plaintiff's products; (2) defendant
13 has violated section 43(a) of the Lanham Act by infringing
14 plaintiff's trade dress and thereby confusing consumers as to the
15 origin of defendant's goods; (3) defendant has violated section
16 43(a) of the Lanham Act by falsely claiming that plaintiff's and
17 defendant's goods have the same origin; (4) defendant has infringed
18 plaintiff's copyrights in its tiles; (5) defendant's conduct
19 violates the California unfair competition law, Cal Bus & Prof Code
20 § 17200; and (6) defendant has engaged in false advertising under
21 California statutory and common law. Defendant seeks summary
22 judgment on all counts.

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24 II

25 In reviewing a summary judgment motion, the court must
26 determine whether genuine issues of material fact exist, resolving
27 any doubt in favor of the party opposing the motion. "[S]ummary
28 judgment will not lie if the dispute about a material fact is

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 'genuine,' that is, if the evidence is such that a reasonable jury
2 could return a verdict for the nonmoving party." Anderson v
3 Liberty Lobby, 477 US 242, 248 (1986). "Only disputes over facts
4 that might affect the outcome of the suit under the governing law
5 will properly preclude the entry of summary judgment." Id. And
6 the burden of establishing the absence of a genuine issue of
7 material fact lies with the moving party. Celotex Corp v Catrett,
8 477 US 317, 322-23 (1986). When the moving party has the burden of
9 proof on an issue, the party's showing must be sufficient for the
10 court to hold that no reasonable trier of fact could find other
11 than for the moving party. Calderone v United States, 799 F2d 254,
12 258-59 (6th Cir 1986). Summary judgment is granted only if the
13 moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. FRCP
14 56(c).

15 The nonmoving party may not simply rely on the pleadings,
16 however, but must produce significant probative evidence supporting
17 its claim that a genuine issue of material fact exists. TW Elec
18 Serv v Pacific Elec Contractors Ass'n, 809 F2d 626, 630 (9th Cir
19 1987). The evidence presented by the nonmoving party "is to be
20 believed, and all justifiable inferences are to be drawn in his
21 favor." Anderson, 477 US at 255. "[T]he judge's function is not
22 himself to weigh the evidence and determine the truth of the matter
23 but to determine whether there is a genuine issue for trial." Id
24 at 249.

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III

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3 Section 43(a) of the Lanham Act gives a producer a cause
4 of action for the use by any person of "any word, term, name,
5 symbol, or device, or any combination thereof * * * which * * * is
6 likely to cause confusion * * * as to origin, sponsorship, or
7 approval of his or her goods." 15 USC § 1125(a). This cause of
8 action has been extended to cover a product's "trade dress" – a
9 category that traditionally consisted of packaging, but in modern
10 parlance includes the design and shape of the product itself. See
11 Vision Sports, Inc v Melville Corp, 888 F2d 609, 613 (9th Cir 1989)
12 (noting that trade dress includes "features such as size, shape,
13 color, color combinations, texture or graphics."). A claim for
14 infringement of trade dress requires a plaintiff to prove three
15 elements: (1) distinctiveness, (2) non-functionality and (3)
16 likelihood of confusion. Kendall-Jackson Winery Ltd v E & J Gallo
17 Winery, 150 F3d 1042, 1046-47 (9th Cir 1998).

18

Courts exercise "particular caution" when extending
19 protection to product designs because such claims present an acute
20 risk of stifling competition. Landscape Forms, Inc v Columbia
21 Cascade Co, 113 F3d 373, 380 (2d Cir 1997). "While most trademarks
22 only create a monopoly in a word, a phrase or a symbol, granting
23 trade dress protection to an ordinary product design * * *
24 creates[s] a monopoly in the goods themselves." Yurman Design, Inc
25 v PAJ, Inc, 262 F3d 101, 115 (2d Cir 2001).

26

As a preliminary matter, defendant challenges plaintiff's
27 claim for trade dress on the ground that plaintiff fails to
28 identify the claimed trade dress with particularity. The leading

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 case cited by defendant on the need to articulate trade dress with
2 particularity is Yurman Design, Inc v PAJ, Inc, 262 F3d 101 (2d Cir
3 2001). At issue in that case was plaintiff's line of jewelry,
4 about which the Second Circuit noted: "The overall impression
5 conveyed by the Yurman designs that are alleged to embody Yurman's
6 trade dress is a structural, almost industrial motif of twisted
7 multi-strand cable, executed with a polished and elegant finish,
8 and set off by gemstones." Id at 114. The Second Circuit rejected
9 this "overall impression" theory of trade dress, concluding that
10 Yurman "never identified the elements that make up its trade dress,
11 * * * [and] this failure to articulate the dress required dismissal
12 of the Lanham Act claim as a matter of law." Id.

13 The basis for Yurman's holding is the rule that generic
14 product designs are unprotectible even upon a showing of secondary
15 meaning. See Abercrombie & Fitch Stores, Inc v American Eagle
16 Outfitters, Inc, 280 F3d 619 (6th Cir 2002) (recognizing that
17 "generic product configurations," or "designs regarded by the
18 public as the basic form of a particular item," should not be
19 protectible even upon a showing of secondary meaning). This court
20 recognizes the difficulty of applying traditional definitions of
21 "genericness" to product design features. See, e.g., AM General
22 Corp v Daimler Chrysler Corp, 311 F3d 796, 828 (7th Cir 2002) ("The
23 traditional method of measuring a mark's strength with a yardstick
24 that runs from generic at one end to arbitrary and fanciful at the
25 other is a clumsy method when measuring the strength of trade dress
26 or product design"). But the rule against enforcing generic
27 product features guards against the acquisition of broad trademark
28 exclusivities that bear little relation to consumer confusion.

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 Cases addressing product design suggest that the term
2 "genericness" covers three situations: (1) if the definition of a
3 product design is overbroad or too generalized; (2) if a product
4 design is the basic form of a type of product; or (3) if the
5 product design is so common in the industry that it cannot be said
6 to identify a particular source. Jeffrey Milstein, Inc v Greger,
7 Lawlor, Roth, Inc, 58 F3d 27, 32 (2d Cir 1995); Yurman, 262 F3d at
8 115 (concluding that a "generic" product design may also be defined
9 as one that "refer[s] to the genus of which the particular product
10 is a species"); Mana Prods, Inc v Columbia Cosmetics Mfg, Inc, 65
11 F3d 1063 (2d Cir 1995). See also Big Island Candies, Inc v The
12 Cookie Corner, 269 F Supp 2d 1236 (D Haw 2003).

13 In Kendall-Jackson Winery, Ltd v E & J Gallo Winery, 150
14 F3d 1042 (9th Cir 1998), the Ninth Circuit's approach to
15 genericness in the context of a trademark dispute applies also to a
16 trade dress claim. In Kendall-Jackson, the court held that grape-
17 leaf designs had become generic emblems for wine because grape
18 leaves are commonly used to decorate labels on wine bottles and
19 because the grape leaf alone "has lost the power to differentiate
20 brands." Id at 1049. Hence, the court defined genericness in
21 terms of both commonness and generality.

22 Turning to the trade dress at issue here, the court notes
23 that plaintiff's complaint alleges three categories of trade dress,
24 covering the individual tiles, the Avignon tile line and the tile
25 displays. The elements said to constitute plaintiff's protectible
26 trade dress for its individual tiles are as follows:

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United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

[Plaintiff's] tiles are distinguished by their classical designs and careful craftsmanship, which give the tiles the look of Old World handiwork. The tiles are further distinguished by the depth and dimensions of their design relief, i e, the range between the highest and lowest points of relief, as well as by the level of intricate detailing at all levels of the relief. The tiles are further distinguished by [the] use of colors and glazes that enhance the appearance of Old World craftsmanship. Plaintiff further invokes Old World craftsmanship through its unique approach to designing and marketing tiles, through which [plaintiff] creates collections of tiles designed with a particular theme in mind.

Doc #84 (Degenshein decl), Ex D, no 15.

Although not articulated in its complaint, plaintiff now sets forth elements for its Avignon line as well. The Avignon line is said to combine elements of both geometric and botanical art with other design elements in order to convey a French provençal look and feel. More specifically, the trade dress of the Avignon line includes the following:

- (1) the rustic look of hand-shaped tiles;
- (2) the specific designs, and combinations of designs, selected by plaintiff to evoke certain styles of French architecture or art;
- (3) the use of certain glazing techniques to create color tones to reflect their three-dimensional, sculpted appearance;
- (4) complex three-dimensional relief to give the tiles an architectural character;
- (5) a textured appearance that evokes the weathered look of stone carving; and
- (6) a palette of colors reminiscent of Provence.

Overend decl, Ex G (Becker), 18:7-25, 21:2-23:8, 62:13-14, 64:16-65:3, 108:12-109:3, 171:1-6.

Finally, plaintiff asserts trade dress protection over its tile displays. It defines the trade dress for its displays as follows:

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1 [Plaintiff] pioneered the use of three types of tile
2 displays * * *. In its built-in vignettes, [plaintiff]
3 builds a full-size model of a portion of a home - a
4 corner of a bathroom * * * or a wall of a kitchen,
5 complete with fixtures - and uses that model to
6 demonstrate how its tiles may be used in a real life
7 setting. [Plaintiff's] concept boards are a smaller-
8 scale, portable version of the same idea * * *.
[Plaintiff's] library boards [demonstrate] the concept-
9 oriented product lines that are unique to it [including]
10 samples of the tiles that make up a particular product
11 line. [It] is decorated with complementary colors and
12 designs, and includes a narrative describing the design
13 concept of the particular line.

14 As set forth above, to determine whether plaintiff's
15 product design is generic, the court assesses whether (1) the
16 design's definition is overbroad or too generalized; (2) the design
17 is the basic form of a type of product; or (3) the design is so
18 common in the industry that it cannot be said to identify a
19 particular source. Again, the motivation for requiring strict
20 definition is that "trade dress claims raise a potent risk that
21 relief will impermissibly afford a level of 'protection that would
22 hamper efforts to market competitive goods.'" Yurman, 262 F3d at
23 114 (quoting Landscape Forms, 113 F3d at 380). See also Wal-Mart
24 Stores, Inc v Samara Bros, 529 US 205, 213 n12 (2000) ("Consumers
25 should not be deprived of the benefits of competition with regard
26 to the utilitarian and esthetic purposes that product design
ordinarily serves.")

27 The court first finds that some of the elements of
28 plaintiff's proposed trade dress are overbroad. The court
acknowledges that trade dress of "decorative or artistic" works may
be harder to capture in words, and "may need descriptions more
broadly framed." Yurman, 262 F3d at 115. But for some of the
trade dress elements, plaintiff resorts to empty generalities in

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 the face of more precise alternatives. For instance, to describe
2 the colors of the trade dress, plaintiff should list the actual
3 colors rather than claim a "palette of colors reminiscent of
4 Provence." Or instead of defining the three-dimensional relief as
5 "complex," plaintiff should provide the magnitude and angle of
6 relief that render plaintiff's tiles distinctive. Finally, some
7 terms leave the boundary of plaintiff's trade dress rights unclear,
8 such as the terms "rustic look," "weathered look," "architectural
9 character" or even "Old World handiwork." These terms fail to
10 provide adequate notice to competitors in the decorative tile
11 business regarding the breadth of plaintiff's exclusivity rights.

12 The court also notes that portions of plaintiff's trade
13 dress definition constitute the basic form of tile design. For
14 examples, a three-dimensional tile design necessarily uses "design
15 relief," stone tiles will usually retain the "look of stone
16 carving" and many manufacturers seek the "the rustic look of hand-
17 shaped tiles."

18 Finally, plaintiff's design is common in the industry.
19 Plaintiff's own witnesses admit that at least eight competitors
20 market and sell a French provençal tile line. Doc #84, Ex I
21 (Leiferman depo) at 38:3-12; Ex G (Reef depo) at 37:9-12; 38.
22 Indeed, the very reason plaintiff's tiles evoke the "look of Old
23 World handiwork" is because the tiles copy styles that craftsman
24 have used for centuries. Plaintiff's tile display design is
25 similarly generic. Despite representations to the contrary,
26 plaintiff did not "pioneer" the marketing strategy of "build[ing] a
27 full-size model" in order to "demonstrate how its tiles may be used
28 in a real life."

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

That defendant takes issue with the proposed trade dress elements should not come as a surprise to plaintiff. Throughout this litigation, defendant has sought further details regarding the scope of plaintiff's claimed trade dress. The deposition of plaintiff's Rule 30(b)(6) witness, who was produced specifically to testify regarding plaintiff's alleged trade dress elements, amounted to an exercise in evasion. For example, in response to inquiries about "depth of relief," plaintiff's Rule 30(b)(6) witness remarked: "[t]he thing that is most unique about the depth of relief and dimension of the design relief is that they are elements that are used in creating specific and unique designs." Doc #84 (Degenshein decl), Ex B at 76:21-25. When asked to describe the trade dress of plaintiff's Romanesque tile, plaintiff's witness replied: "[w]hat it is about their tile * * * is the fact that this tiles is a part of a collection that is recognized to be plaintiff's product." Id at 38: 22-25.

Based on the evidence submitted by the parties, the court concludes that the trade dress proposed by plaintiff is generic. The concept of trade dress is not so pliable that it can be stretched to give exclusive rights to such abstract images or marketing themes as those proposed by plaintiff here. See Landscape Forms, 113 F3d at 381 ("If the law protected style at such a level of abstraction, Braque might have prevented Picasso from selling cubist paintings in the United States.").

Having found plaintiff's trade dress to be generic, the court must determine the appropriate remedy. Courts occasionally permit a trade dress plaintiff to offer an updated formulation of the trade dress elements at a later stage in the litigation. See

1 Coach, Inc v We Care Trading Co, Inc, 2001 US Dist LEXIS 9879 (SDNY
2 2001) ("Coach had provided varying formulations of this trade dress
3 in its pre-trial papers but offered this definition at the
4 pre-trial conference when asked by the court for a final statement
5 of its trade dress."). Yet the court has not found a case
6 permitting such revisions after a motion for summary judgment has
7 been filed. This absence of case law is not surprising; it would
8 be inappropriate to allow plaintiff to attempt to remedy a legal
9 deficiency in the trade dress articulation after defendant's
10 principal summary judgment briefing, especially in view of
11 plaintiff's apparent efforts to resist offering a precise
12 definition. Moreover, because the court concludes, as explained
13 below, that defendant is entitled to summary judgment on other
14 grounds as well, the court declines to grant plaintiff leave to
15 revise its trade dress elements.

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18 Trade dress protection extends only to design features
19 that are nonfunctional. See Qualitex Co v Jacobson Prods Co, 514
20 US 159, 164 (1995). Courts consider a feature functional if it is
21 "essential to the use or purpose of the article [or] affects [its]
22 cost or quality." Inwood Labs, Inc v Ives Labs, Inc, 456 US 844,
23 851 n10 (1982). This definition is often referred to as
24 "utilitarian" functionality, as it relates to the performance of
25 the product in its intended purpose. Hence, "[t]he functionality
26 doctrine prevents trademark law, which seeks to promote competition
27 by protecting a firm's reputation, from instead inhibiting
28 legitimate competition by allowing a producer to control a useful

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 product feature." Qualitex, 514 US at 164. See also TraFix
2 Devices, Inc v Marketing Displays, Inc, 532 US 23 (2001).

3 Under Qualitex and TraFix, the test for functionality
4 proceeds in two steps. First, courts inquire whether the alleged
5 "significant non-trademark function" is "essential to the use or
6 purpose of the article or if it affects the cost or quality of the
7 article." TraFix, 532 US at 32-33. Next, courts determine
8 whether protection of the feature as a trademark would impose a
9 significant non-reputation-related competitive disadvantage. Id.
10 See also Qualitex, 514 US at 165. If the feature does not satisfy
11 either step, it is nonfunctional and protectible.

12 To assist courts in determining functionality, the Ninth
13 Circuit has offered a four-part test: (1) whether the design
14 yields a utilitarian advantage; (2) whether alternative designs are
15 available; (3) whether advertising touts the utilitarian advantage
16 of the design; and (4) whether the particular design results from a
17 comparatively simple or inexpensive method of manufacture. Disc
18 Golf Ass'n, Inc v Champion Discs, Inc, 158 F3d 1002, 1006 (9th Cir
19 1998). See also Talking Rain Beverage Co v South Beach Beverage
20 Co, 349 F3d 601, 603-04 (9th Cir 2003) (applying the four factors
21 to conclude that a bottle design was utilitarian).

22 Defendant contends the tile designs yield utilitarian
23 advantages due to their aesthetic functionality. In response,
24 plaintiff insists the Ninth Circuit has "expressly rejected the
25 'aesthetic functionality' standard." Doc #104 at 16. Yet neither
26 party correctly characterizes the status of the aesthetic
27 functionality standard, which, according to a recent Ninth Circuit
28 decision, "retains some limited vitality." Au-Tomotive Gold, Inc v

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 Volkswagen of Am, Inc., 457 F3d 1062 (9th Cir 2006). In practice,
2 aesthetic functionality has been limited to product features that
3 serve an aesthetic purpose wholly independent of any
4 source-identifying function. See Qualitex, 514 US at 166 (coloring
5 dry cleaning pads served non-trademark purpose by avoiding visible
6 stains); Publications Int'l, Ltd v Landoll, Inc, 164 F3d 337, 342
7 (7th Cir 1998) (coloring edges of cookbook pages served non-
8 trademark purpose by avoiding color "bleeding" between pages);
9 Brunswick Corp v British Seagull Ltd, 35 F3d 1527, 1532 (Fed Cir
10 1994) (color black served non-trademark purpose by reducing the
11 apparent size of outboard boat engine).

12 As the Ninth Circuit admits, its case law on aesthetic
13 functionality "do[es] not easily weave together to produce a
14 coherent jurisprudence." Au-Tomotive Gold, 457 F3d at 1068. On
15 the one hand, plaintiff's tiles serve an aesthetic function
16 unrelated to source-identification: namely, their function is
17 decoration. But on the other hand, the functionality doctrine
18 apparently distinguishes between "ornamental" and utilitarian
19 functions. See Talking Rain Beverage Co, 349 F3d at 603-04 (9th
20 Cir 2003) (applying this distinction between functional and
21 ornamental); Clicks Billiards, Inc v Sixshooters Inc, 251 F3d 1252,
22 1260 (9th Cir 2001) (characterizing "aesthetic functionality" as an
23 "oxymoron"). Hence, the Ninth Circuit's view that ornament is non-
24 utilitarian obliges the court to conclude that plaintiff's tiles do
25 not yield a utilitarian advantage, notwithstanding their decorative
26 function.

27 That the tile's aesthetic appeal cannot constitute a
28 utilitarian benefit undermines defendant's remaining contentions

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 regarding functionality. Defendant alleges that plaintiff "touts
2 the trade dress' utilitarian advantages." Doc #82 at 14. But
3 these advertisements describe the aesthetic beauty of the tiles,
4 not the functional utility.

5 Because plaintiff's tile design is not essential to the
6 use or purpose of the product, the court turns to the second
7 inquiry: whether plaintiff's design performs a function so that
8 the "exclusive use of [the design] would put competitors at a
9 significant non-reputation-related disadvantage." TraFFix, 532 US
10 at 32 (quoting Qualitex, 532 US at 165). The parties do not
11 discuss this issue, but it appears to pose factual questions that
12 cannot be resolved at this stage in the litigation. Plaintiff
13 asserts in its brief that other manufacturers sell tiles and tile
14 collections with a French provençal theme, implying that
15 competition is not disadvantaged. But more extensive market data
16 would be necessary to demonstrate the absence of significant
17 competitive disadvantage.

18 In sum, plaintiff's design features constitute ornamental
19 attributes of the product; therefore, the court concludes these
20 features are nonfunctional.

21

22 2

23 In an action for infringement of unregistered trade dress
24 under § 43(a) of the Lanham Act, "a product's design is
25 distinctive, and therefore protectible, only upon a showing of
26 secondary meaning." Wal-Mart Stores, 529 US at 216. Such meaning
27 occurs when, "in the minds of the public, the primary significance
28 of a [mark] is to identify the source of the product rather than

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 the product itself." Id at 211 (quoting Inwood Labs, Inc v Ives
2 Labs, Inc, 456 US 844, 851 n11 (1982)). See also TraFix, 532 US at
3 29 (2001) (noting that "product design almost invariably serves
4 purposes other than source identification").

5 In the Ninth Circuit, secondary meaning is defined as
6 "the mental association by a substantial segment of consumers and
7 potential consumers between the alleged mark and a single source of
8 the product." Levi Strauss & Co v Blue Bell, Inc, 778 F2d 1352,
9 1354 (9th Cir 1985) (quoting in part 1 J McCarthy, §§ 15:2 at 659
10 and 15:11(B) at 686)). An expert survey of purchasers typically
11 provides the most persuasive evidence of secondary meaning. Levi
12 Strauss & Co v Blue Bell, Inc, 778 F2d 1352, 1358 (9th Cir 1985)
13 (en banc).

14 Here, plaintiff's survey performed by Dr Henry Ostberg
15 found that 36% of interior designers in the six states where the
16 parties compete, and 25% of interior designers interviewed
17 nationwide, recognized either all or some of plaintiff's tiles as
18 being produced by a specific company known to them. Overlend decl,
19 Ex K at 3. Defendant criticizes Dr Ostberg for utilizing an
20 underinclusive test group; that is, the survey sampled interior
21 designers, yet plaintiff's customers include builders, design
22 centers, architects, contractors and end users (i e, home owners or
23 purchasers and retail customers). Doc #84, Ex A (Petrocelli depo)
24 at 91:15-25, Ex I (Leiferman depo) at 100: 2-25; 101:9-15; Ex M
25 (Wright depo) at 8:23-25; 9:1-2. See also Vision Sports, Inc v
26 Melville Corp, 888 F2d 609, 615 (9th Cir 1989) (noting that "an
27 expert survey of purchasers may provide the most persuasive
28 evidence of secondary meaning") (emphasis added).

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 The court agrees with defendant that the limited survey
2 population reduces its probative value, but the court declines to
3 rule the survey inadmissible, Doc #87. See J T McCarthy, McCarthy
4 on Trademarks and Unfair Competition, (4th Ed 2003) § 32:159 ("A
5 survey of the wrong 'universe' will be of little probative value in
6 litigation."). To assess secondary meaning, the courts "must stand
7 in the shoes of the *ordinary purchaser*, buying under the normally
8 prevalent conditions of the market and giving the attention such
9 purchasers usually give in buying that class of goods." Iowa Paint
10 Mfg Co, Inc v Hirshfield's Paint Mfg, Inc, 296 F Supp 2d 983, 998
11 (SD IA 2003) (emphasis added). Yet even plaintiff's Rule 30(b)(6)
12 witness concedes that interior designers are not "retail" or
13 "average" customers, as they hold specialized knowledge of the tile
14 industry. Doc #84, Ex B (Becker depo) at 136:12-18; 141:20-25;
15 142:1-9. See also, Id, Ex F (Reed depo) at 33:2-6. Due to these
16 shortcomings, the court assumes that, if the survey had included a
17 proportionate sampling of all customers, the percentage of
18 respondents identifying the tile design would be lower. See Yankee
19 Candle, 259 F3d at n14 (noting that opinions of retailers and those
20 active in the field not evidence of views of the consuming public).
Indeed, plaintiff's survey undercuts its argument for secondary
meaning: the survey suggests that over three quarters of the most
sophisticated purchasers do not recognize plaintiff's tiles as
being produced by a specific company.

25 In view of plaintiff's unconvincing direct evidence, the
26 court turns to circumstantial evidence, which includes: (1) the
27 length and exclusivity of use of the trade dress; (2) the nature
28 and extent of advertising and promotion of the trade dress (3) the

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 existence of substantial advertising; (4) the product's established
2 place in the market; (5) proof of intentional copying; and (6)
3 "look for" promotion that specifically directs a consumer's
4 attention to those features claimed as trade dress. Yankee Candle,
5 259 F3d at 43-44.

6 The Ninth Circuit's decision in First Brands Corp v Fred
7 Meyer, Inc, 809 F2d 1378 (9th Cir 1987) governs whether advertising
8 expenditures support a finding of secondary meaning:

9 Evidence of sales, advertising and promotional
10 activities may be relevant in determining whether a
11 trade dress has acquired a secondary meaning * * *.
12 However, the advertising and promotional activities must
13 involve "image advertising," that is, the ads must
14 feature in some way the trade dress itself. Otherwise,
15 even evidence of extensive advertising or other
promotional efforts would not necessarily indicate that
prospective buyers would associate the trade dress with
a particular source. A large expenditure of money does
not in itself create legally protectable rights. The
test of secondary meaning is the effectiveness of the
effort to create it.

16 Id at 1383 (internal citations omitted). The plaintiff in First
17 Brands sought to establish secondary meaning for its yellow
18 antifreeze container by introducing evidence of its total
19 advertising expenditures and its five-year, exclusive use of the
20 container. Id. The Ninth Circuit affirmed the district court's
21 denial of injunctive relief, noting that plaintiff's advertising,
22 although extensive, did not "attempt to engender consumer
23 identification with the yellow, F-style jug" and "did not, for
24 example, urge consumers to look for the 'familiar yellow jug.'"
25
Id.

26 Akin to the plaintiff in First Bank, the plaintiff here
27 submits advertising that emphasizes design product traits, but
28

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 fails to draw attention to these features as source identifiers.
2 See Yankee Candle, 259 F3d at 44. Plaintiff concedes it has not
3 used so-called "look for" advertising, but urges the court to infer
4 secondary meaning from the magnitude of plaintiff's advertising
5 expenditures, which amounts to approximately eight million dollars.
6 The court rejects plaintiff's reasoning. To be probative of
7 secondary meaning, the advertising must direct the consumer to
8 those features claimed as trade dress; merely "featuring" the
9 relevant aspect of the product does not suffice. To provide
10 protection based on extensive advertising would extend trade dress
11 protection to the design of every product with national marketing.
12 Accordingly, plaintiff's advertising expenditures do not constitute
13 circumstantial evidence in support of secondary meaning.

14 Plaintiff also asks the court to infer secondary meaning
15 from plaintiff's exclusive use of its design between 1999 and 2004,
16 the period between product introduction and the date defendant
17 commenced its alleged infringement. Whether secondary meaning
18 attaches after a period of exclusive use depends on how, rather
19 than how long, the plaintiff used its mark or design. See McCarthy
20 § 15:53 at 15-77 (noting that length of time "is merely one
21 additional piece of evidence to be weighed with all others in
22 determining the existence of secondary meaning."). Widespread
23 promotional activities enable a design to obtain secondary meaning
24 in a short period. See, e.g., LA Gear, Inc v Thom McAn Shoe Co, 988
25 F2d 1117, 1130 (Fed Cir 1993) (secondary meaning achieved for
26 sports shoe design after only six months due to extensive
27 advertising and promotion). But a lack of evidence supporting the
28 other factors relevant to secondary meaning may diminish the

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 probative value of even a long period of exclusive use. See Bank
2 of Texas v Commerce Southwest, Inc, 741 F2d 785, 788 (5th Cir 1984)
3 (no secondary meaning for "Bank of Texas" mark despite nine years
4 of exclusive use because plaintiff did not promote its mark outside
5 narrow geographic area)

6 Here, plaintiff's five-year period of exclusive use
7 provided ample time for its design to obtain secondary meaning.
8 But secondary meaning cannot emerge in a vacuum, and the undisputed
9 evidence detailed earlier confirms that plaintiff undertook little
10 effort to create secondary meaning during this period of exclusive
11 use. Despite a considerable amount of advertising, only a trivial
12 amount highlights the particular trade dress as source identifying.

13 Finally, plaintiff proffers evidence of defendant's
14 copying to support an inference of secondary meaning. See Vision
15 Sports, Inc v Melville Corp, 888 F2d 609, 615 (9th Cir 1989). See
16 also Transgo, Inc, v Ajac Transmission Parts Corp, 768 F2d 1001
17 (9th Cir 1985) (citing Audio Fidelity, Inc, v High Fidelity
18 Recordings, Inc, 283 F2d 551, 557 (9th Cir 1960)). Prior to the
19 litigation, defendant allegedly admitted it took plaintiff's tiles
20 to China to have them copied. Overend decl, Ex I (Reed) at 56:13-
21 57:9-12, 79:23-80:10. Further, the court agrees with plaintiff
22 that the similarity between the tiles is striking. See Id, Ex Q.

23 Proof of deliberate copying is not determinative,
24 however, as it does not necessarily establish that the copying is
25 intended to confuse customers and capitalize on recognition of the
26 plaintiff's product. See Fuddruckers, Inc v Doc's B R Others, Inc,
27 826 F2d 837, 844-45 (9th Cir 1987). Competitors may intentionally
28 copy product features for a variety of reasons; they may, for

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 example, choose to copy design traits in response to consumer
2 preference. Given the lack of direct and circumstantial evidence
3 supporting secondary meaning, the court concludes that defendant's
4 copying does not suffice. The court thus concludes that
5 plaintiff's trade dress is unprotectible because its tiles have not
6 acquired secondary meaning. Accordingly, the court GRANTS summary
7 judgment on plaintiff's trade dress claims under the Lanham Act.

8

9

B

10 Defendant moves for summary judgment on plaintiff's false
11 advertising claim, asserting that "[p]laintiff has not produced any
12 evidence to support any one of [the claim's] elements." Doc #82 at
13 22.

14 To state a claim for false advertising under §
15 43(a)(1)(B), a plaintiff must allege:

16 (1) a false statement of fact by the defendant
17 in a commercial advertisement about its own or
another's product; (2) the statement actually
deceived or has the tendency to deceive a
substantial segment of its audience; (3) the
deception is material, in that it is likely to
influence the purchasing decision; (4) the
defendant caused its false statement to enter
interstate commerce; and (5) the plaintiff has
been or is likely to be injured as a result of
the false statement, either by direct diversion
of sales from itself to defendant or by a
lessening of the goodwill associated with its
products.

24 Southland Sod Farms v Stover Seed Co, 108 F3d 1134, 1139 (9th Cir
25 1997) (citing Cook, Perkiss and Liehe, Inc v Northern Cal
26 Collection Serv, Inc, 911 F2d 242, 244 (9th Cir 1990)) (footnote
27 omitted).

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United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 In the court's order on defendant's motion to dismiss,
2 the court warned plaintiff that its complaint was "weak in the
3 first element in particular, because it is light on allegations
4 specific to defendant's 'commercial advertising,' as opposed to the
5 'statements' it generally attributes to defendant." Doc #26 at 15-
6 16. For the following reasons, plaintiff has failed to remedy this
7 weakness.

8 Representations constitute commercial advertising or
9 promotion under the Lanham Act if they are: (1) commercial speech;
10 (2) by a defendant who is in commercial competition with plaintiff;
11 (3) for the purpose of influencing consumers to buy defendant's
12 goods or services. Coastal Abstract Serv v First Am Title Ins Co,
13 173 F3d 725, 735 (9th Cir 1999). Further, although the
14 representations need not be made in a "classic advertising
15 campaign," they must be "disseminated sufficiently to the relevant
16 purchasing public to constitute 'advertising' or 'promotion' within
17 that industry." Id.

18 The alleged false statements at issue here fall into two
19 categories; neither satisfies the test set forth above. First, the
20 alleged statements to customers are not "disseminated sufficiently
21 to the relevant purchasing public." See Coastal Abstract Serv, 173
22 F3d at 735. Although plaintiff portrays defendant's dissemination
23 as widespread, see Doc #104 at 24 (defendant "repeatedly tell[s]
24 customers that the parties' tiles are the same"), the deposition
25 testimony fails to substantiate such a claim. See Overend decl, Ex
26 L at 104:24-106:14. Additionally, plaintiff cites defendant's
27 admission that it "has stated to at least one third party that
28 [defendant's] and [plaintiff's] tiles product [sic] are both made

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 in China." Overend decl, Ex Z. This admission does not
2 demonstrate sufficient dissemination. A handful of statements to
3 customers does not trigger protection from the Lanham Act unless
4 "the potential purchasers in the market are relatively limited in
5 number," Coastal Abstract Serv, Inc v First Am Title Ins Co, 173
6 F3d 725 (9th Cir 1999), which is not the case here.

7 Plaintiff's second category of false advertising consists
8 of defendant's promotion of "its Bellissimia tile line through its
9 catalog" and use of "confusingly similar display boards." Doc #104
10 at 24. The Lanham Act encompasses "more than blatant falsehoods";
11 it also embraces "innuendo, indirect intimations, and ambiguous
12 suggestions evidenced by the consuming public's misapprehension of
13 the hard facts underlying an advertisement." William Morris Co v
14 Group W, Inc, 66 F3d 255 (9th Cir 1995). But if an advertisement
15 is not false on its face, as here, plaintiff must produce evidence,
16 usually in the form of market research or consumer surveys, showing
17 exactly what message ordinary consumers perceived. See Merck
18 Consumer Pharmaceuticals Co v Smithkline Beecham Corp, 960 F2d 294
19 (2d Cir 1992); Johnson & Johnson v Smithkline Beecham Corp, 960 F2d
20 294, 297-98 (2d Cir 1992) (requiring plaintiff to demonstrate that
21 "a statistically significant part of the commercial audience holds
22 the false belief allegedly communicated by the challenged
23 advertisement"); J T, McCarthy, McCarthy on Trademarks and Unfair
24 Competition, § 27-07[2][d] (4th ed 1992).

25 Because defendant's advertisements are not false on their
26 face, plaintiff alleges that the mere subject matter of the
27 advertisement – defendant's similar tiles – is enough to constitute
28 false advertising. Under this interpretation of section 43(a),

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 trade dress violations would ipso facto constitute false
2 advertising. Plaintiff has not identified, and the court has not
3 found, a case in which the truthful promotion of a product whose
4 design violates another's trade dress has given rise to a false
5 advertising claim. Accordingly, the court GRANTS summary judgment
6 on plaintiff's claim for false advertising.

7

8

C

9 In the Ninth Circuit, claims of unfair competition and
10 false advertising under state statutory and common law are
11 "substantially congruent" to claims made under the Lanham Act.
12 Cleary v News Corp, 30 F3d 1255 (9th Cir 1994). Accordingly, for
13 reasons discussed *supra*, the court GRANTS summary judgment on
14 plaintiff's claim for unfair competition pursuant to California
15 Business and Professions Code § 17200 and GRANTS summary judgment
16 on plaintiff's claim for false advertising.

17

18

D

19 Defendant contends plaintiff's copyright infringement
20 claim fails because plaintiff's tile designs are not original. For
21 reasons that follow, the court GRANTS IN PART and DENIES IN PART
22 summary judgment on plaintiff's claim for copyright infringement.

23 To prevail on a claim for copyright infringement,
24 plaintiff must ultimately prove both ownership of a valid copyright
25 and copying of protected expression by defendant. Feist
26 Publications v Rural Telephone Service Co, 499 US 361-63 (1991)
27 Copying may be inferred from (1) access to the copyrighted work by
28 defendant and (2) substantial similarity of both ideas and

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 expression between the copyrighted work and the allegedly
2 infringing work. Data East USA, Inc v Epyx, Inc, 862 F2d 204, 206
3 (9th Cir 1988).

4 Any copyrighted expression must be "original." Feist,
5 499 US at 345. Although the amount of creative input by the author
6 required to meet the originality standard is low, it is not
7 negligible. See Feist, 499 US at 362. There must be something
8 more than a "merely trivial" variation, something recognizably the
9 artist's own. Three Boys Music Corp v Bolton, 212 F3d 477, 489
10 (9th Cir 2000). A combination of unprotectible elements, however,
11 may qualify for copyright protection. Apple Computer, Inc v
12 Microsoft Corp, 35 F3d 1435, 1446 (9th Cir 1994); United States v
13 Hamilton, 583 F2d 448, 451 (9th Cir 1978) (Kennedy, J)
14 ("[O]riginality may be found in taking the commonplace and making
15 it into a new combination or arrangement.").

16 As a preliminary matter, the court addresses the parties'
17 dispute over the effect of plaintiff's copyright registration. It
18 is undisputed that on February 11, 2004, the United States
19 Copyright Office issued certificates of copyright registration to
20 plaintiff for its "Avignon Romanesque Molding" and "Avignon
21 Triellage Moding" designs. Doc #1, Ex B (copyright registrations).
22 The registration of a copyright certificate constitutes *prima facie*
23 evidence of the validity of a copyright in a judicial proceeding
24 commenced within five years of the copyright's first publication.
25 17 USC § 410(c); see also North Coast Industries v Jason Maxwell, Inc, 972 F2d 1031, 1033 (9th Cir 1992). A certificate of copyright
26 registration, therefore, "shifts to the defendant the burden to
27 prove the invalidity of the plaintiff's copyrights." Masquerade

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 Novelty v Unique Indus, 912 F2d 663, 668 (3d Cir 1990). An accused
2 infringer may rebut this presumption of validity, however. See, e
3 g, North Coast, 972 F2d at 1033. To do so, a defendant must offer
4 some evidence or proof to dispute or deny the plaintiff's prima
5 facie case of infringement. See, e g, North Coast, 972 F2d at
6 1033.

7 Defendant, through its expert, Travis Culwell, presents
8 to the court various historical sources that raise serious
9 questions whether plaintiff's tiles are sufficiently "original" to
10 merit copyright protection. In particular, these materials reveal
11 that plaintiff's tiles are nearly identical in appearance to public
12 domain designs. This evidence suffices to show that plaintiff's
13 tiles are "not original but copied from another's work"; therefore,
14 the court finds that defendant has rebutted the statutory
15 presumption, and the burden of proving validity shifts back to
16 plaintiff. See North Coast, 972 F2d at 1033; see also Masquerade
17 Novelty, 912 F2d at 668-69; Durham, 630 F2d at 908-09 (holding that
18 the presumption of validity was rebutted where "one look" at the
19 plaintiff's allegedly copyrightable figures revealed an absence of
20 originality). See also 4 Melville B Nimmer & David Nimmer, Nimmer
21 on Copyright § 12(11)[B] n50 (1999) (noting "proof that the
22 plaintiff copied from prior works should involve the same elements
23 * * * as are required to establish copying by the defendant from
24 the plaintiff, i e, access and similarity.").

25 Having dealt with the registration issue, the court next
26 evaluates whether plaintiff's tiles are copyrightable. That
27 plaintiff's tiles derive from public domain designs does not
28 necessarily deprive them of copyright protection. See Kamar,

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 Int'l, Inc v Russ Berrie & Co, 657 F2d 1059, 1061 (9th Cir 1981).
2 Nevertheless, the copyright protection afforded to works derived
3 from the public domain is more limited than it is for original
4 works of authorship.

5 The court finds that differences exist between the
6 designs in the public domain and those in plaintiff's tiles; hence,
7 the critical issue is whether the differences are non-trivial. Not
8 every modification of a work in the public domain is protectible.
9 For example, copyright law protects "expressions" and not "ideas";
10 consequently, the concepts underlying an expression, however
11 ingenious, may be copied freely. Likewise, the copyright on a work
12 whose design reflects the artist's original advance in technique
13 does not extend to the technical development itself. See 17 USC §
14 102(b) ("In no case does copyright protection for an original work
15 of authorship extend to any idea, procedure, process, system,
16 method of operation, concept, principle, or discovery, regardless
17 of the form in which it is described, explained, illustrated, or
18 embodied in such work."). Finally, even original expression goes
19 unprotected insofar as it is "necessary" to something unprotectible
20 like an idea or a method or process. The expression is then said
21 to merge with the unprotected attribute, and the merger deprives it
22 of protection. See Computer Assocs Int'l, Inc v Altai, Inc, 982
23 F2d 693, 707 (2d Cir 1992)

24 Upon review of defendant's expert report, the court
25 concludes that the Westport and Perle molding designs do not evince
26 sufficient originality for copyright protection. See Nimmer on
27 Copyright § 2-08(C)(2)(noting that "mere production of a work of
28 art in a different medium should not constitute the required

United States District Court

For the Northern District of California

1 originality, for the reason that no one can claim to have
2 independently evolved any particular medium"). See also North
3 Coast, 972 F2d at 1034 (stating that summary judgment is
4 appropriate "where no reasonable trier-of-fact could find even
5 trivial differences in the designs" that were claimed to be
6 copyrightable). By contrast, the Romanesque, Treillage and Fleur
7 de Lis molding designs contain non-trivial differences from the
8 public domain designs. In the Romanesque molding design, for
9 example, plaintiff appears to have made some copyrightable
10 contributions, such as the curls in the leaf, the orientation of
11 the blades and the shape of the veins. To the extent that these
12 and other artistic choices were not copied from the public domain
13 or governed by the ceramic tile medium, they are original elements
14 that plaintiff may protect through copyright law.

15 The court notes that plaintiff's copyrights on the
16 original elements in the Romanesque, Treillage and Fleur de Lis
17 designs are "thin," comprising no more than plaintiff's original
18 contribution to ideas already in the public domain. As a result,
19 plaintiff's copyrights only protect against virtually identical
20 copying. See Ets-Hokin, 323 F3d 763, 766 (9th Cir 2003) ("When we
21 apply the limiting doctrines, subtracting the unoriginal elements,
22 Ets-Hokin is left with * * * a 'thin' copyright, which protects
23 against only virtually identical copying."); Apple, 35 F3d at 1439
24 ("When the range of protectible expression is narrow, the
25 appropriate standard for illicit copying is virtual identity.").

26 Accordingly, the court DENIES defendant's motion for
27 summary judgment on plaintiff's claim for copyright infringement of
28 the Romanesque, Treillage and Fleur de Lis molding designs and

1 GRANTS summary judgment on claims for copyright infringement of the
2 Westport and Perle molding designs.

3

4 IV

5 In sum, the court DENIES IN PART and GRANTS IN PART
6 defendant's motions for summary judgment and DENIES defendant's
7 motion to strike the surveys conducted by plaintiff's expert, Dr
8 Henry Ostberg. The court also DENIES plaintiff's motion to exclude
9 the testimony of defendant's expert, Travis Culwell.

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IT IS SO ORDERED.

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14
15 VAUGHN R WALKER

16 United States District Chief Judge

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